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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DJIBOUTI 000576

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/E AND IO
CJTF-HOA FOR POLAD
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA-WATCHER

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [EAGR](#) [DJ](#) [UN](#)

SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI REQUESTS EXPULSION OF WFP REPRESENTATIVE

REF: A. DJIBOUTI 543

[1](#)B. DJIBOUTI 535 (NOTAL)

Classified By: ERIC WONG, CHARGE D'AFFAIRES, A.I. REASON: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. Following months of growing tensions (refs A-B), Djibouti's acting foreign minister has formally requested the replacement of the current World Food Program Resident Representative (WFP ResRep), who is asked to depart "as soon as possible" due to "absence of cooperation" with authorities and "a deep deterioration in relations". Local UN agency heads recommend against the USG protesting this expulsion, noting that the GODJ has simultaneously agreed to the resumption of WFP food distribution and monitoring, and citing interpersonal conflicts between the WFP ResRep and both WFP colleagues and host country cabinet-level officials. These actions come when Djibouti faces dire food insecurity, as a result of severe drought affecting the entire Horn of Africa, compounded by internal displacement stemming from border tensions with Eritrea. The previous day, the WFP ResRep had expressed optimism that WFP could double its food relief operations in Djibouti by beginning a pilot program to distribute food to urban populations: rising from 55,000 drought-affected Djiboutians to a total of 130,000--or nearly one-fifth of Djibouti's entire population. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) On July 3, Charge and USAID Representative met with UNICEF ResRep Aloys Kamuragiye (who currently serves as acting UN Resident Coordinator of UN agencies in Djibouti, in the absence of UNDP ResRep Sunil Saigal). Kamuragiye provided Charge with a copy of a letter received earlier in the day (but dated July 2) from acting Foreign Minister Ahmed Ali Silay (forwarded to AF/E and USAID/EA), which requests that WFP ResRep Benoit Thiry depart Djibouti as soon as possible. Thiry, a Belgian national, arrived in Djibouti in July 2005, and formerly served for 7 years as a WFP logistician in Burundi.

WFP REP: ANTAGONIZED COLLEAGUES AND HOST COUNTRY OFFICIALS

[1](#)3. (C) Kamuragiye strongly recommended that the USG refrain from protesting Thiry's removal or raising it with the GODJ, citing not only long accumulating personal tensions between Thiry and senior GODJ officials, but also dissatisfaction within the UN itself with Thiry's management style.

[1](#)4. (C) Following a three-day visit to Djibouti that had just concluded July 2, the Amman-based UNICEF regional director

had informed the Cairo-based WFP regional director of the need to address problems within the WFP office in Djibouti. According to Kamuragiye, Thiry had been "in an open war" with his deputy WFP ResRep, a man from Mali who had previously served "effectively" as deputy to Thiry's immediate predecessor, but who had later filed a formal complaint in the UN personnel system against Thiry, asserting that Thiry was belittling host government officials. Despite Thiry having requested the removal of this deputy, WFP's regional office had kept him in Djibouti working on regional taskings.

An Italian woman (at the UN's P-4 grade) had become the new deputy to Thiry (a P-5).

¶5. (C) Thiry had also antagonized Minister of Interior Yacin Elmi Bouh, and had experienced tensions "from day one" with one of the ministry's two Secretaries-General: Hassan Omar Ali, who also served as Director of the GODJ's refugee agency, the National Office of Assistance to Refugees and Disaster Stricken People (ONARS). An UN security officer had once had to intervene to defuse an argument at UN offices between Thiry and Ali, Kamuragiye said. On June 29, Minister Bouh formally complained in writing to Thiry of "his arrogant approach" and "clandestine offices," and demanded the resumption of the distribution of monthly food rations to drought victims. (NOTE: According to Kamuragiye, the complaint about "clandestine offices" reflects GODJ suspicion of Djiboutian nationals serving as WFP monitors and drivers--2 monitors and 1 driver in each of 5 districts--particularly in northern Djibouti, where Kamuragiye said GODJ officials may have sought to prevent UN monitoring of possible Ethiopian arms shipments to Djibouti.

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END NOTE.) During a 90-minute meeting on July 2 with Kamuragiye--which Kamuragiye had incorrectly believed had defused the possibility of Thiry being expelled--Minister Bouh was "like a volcano", expressing "a lot of tension" about Thiry.

¶6. (C) In mid-May, Minister of Presidential Affairs Osman Ahmed Moussa had complained to Kamuragiye (as acting UN Resident Coordinator) about Thiry. In mid-June, according to UNDP ResRep Saigal, in a New York meeting with the deputy head of UNOCHA, Foreign Minister Mahmoud Ali Youssef had complained about Thiry's "colonialist" attitude. When Saigal subsequently raised the issue with President Guelleh's Chief of Staff Ismael Houssein Tani, Tani simply noted that a response from the GODJ was forthcoming. While the July 2 letter to expel Thiry bore the signature of the acting foreign minister (the FM was attending the AU Summit), whether to declare Thiry persona non grata (PNG) had been the subject of an interministerial cabinet level meeting on July

¶1. According to the Minister of Interior, this arose following discussion of WFP's decision to halt food shipments scheduled for June 23. (NOTE: In a July 2 meeting with Charge and USAID Rep, Kamuragiye said he had informed the Minister of Interior that this distribution would resume July 3, and incorrectly predicted that resumption would render the growing possibility of Thiry's expulsion moot. END NOTE.)

NEED TO SALVAGE RELATIONSHIP FOR NEXT WFP REPRESENTATIVE

¶7. (C) Kamuragiye underscored his belief that the GODJ's dissatisfaction was directed personally at Thiry, not against WFP operations, which had not/not been suspended or questioned in the MFA's letter. He noted that the MFA letter requested that Thiry be replaced. Protesting Thiry's being declared persona non grata would only encourage the GODJ to generate a laundry list of complaints, Kamuragiye said. Upon receiving the MFA's letter earlier in the day, Kamuragiye said he had immediately contacted the Minister of Education (as WFP monitors had used education ministry offices), but that the Minister had said, "It's too late." Kamuragiye noted the lack of response from the EU Charge and the French

Ambassador (who had only asked how long Thiry had before he was to leave the country). (NOTE: French Ambassador Dominique DeCherf was himself given 24 hours to leave Rwanda in 2005, when Kagame cut diplomatic relations with France. END NOTE.)

18. (C) Kamuragiye stressed the need for a senior executive from WFP headquarters to conduct an investigation of Thiry's tenure in Djibouti, "to determine deficiencies" on the part of both the GODJ and Thiry, in order to "prepare the way" for Thiry's replacement to succeed.

ON THE PREVIOUS DAY, PLANS TO EXPAND WFP ACTIVITIES

19. (C) Local UN officials, including Thiry himself, had been anticipating Thiry's possible expulsion, due to growing tensions between WFP and the GODJ--including GODJ obstruction of WFP monitors and of WFP teams assessing emergency food needs, which had prompted WFP to suspend food deliveries to drought-affected northern populations in late June (refs A-B). However, following a July 2 meeting with the Minister of Interior in which the Minister agreed to allow WFP monitors (who worked out of offices at the Ministry of Education) to resume their field activities and encouraged local officials to cooperate with WFP, both Thiry and Kamuragiye believed (incorrectly) that "the crisis is over". Indeed, Thiry reported on July 2 that WFP sought to expand activities dramatically in Djibouti: more than doubling food aid from a base of 55,000 drought-affected Djiboutians to more than 130,000: comprising 80,000 in rural areas and 40-50,000 in the capital city of Djibouti. WFP was considering using Djibouti as one of 6-10 pilot countries for food distribution to urban populations (e.g., in the form of a food coupon allowing the discounted purchase of food).

110. (C) COMMENT. That numerous cabinet-level ministers have privately raised concerns about WFP ResRep Thiry--including

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the Foreign Minister, Interior Minister, Education Minister, and President's Chief of Staff--strongly suggests that the GODJ's decision to declare Thiry persona non grata is irreversible. In previous meetings with Emboffs, Thiry acknowledged difficult relations with the GODJ (refs A-B). The Minister of Interior's July 2 decision to allow WFP to resume monitoring and assessment activities--in order to allow WFP to resume food deliveries--followed immediately by the acting Foreign Minister's letter dated the same day requesting the replacement of the WFP representative, highlights that the GODJ's objection to the current WFP ResRep may be based more on personality than on policy. GODJ principals may be at fault too, however; Ministry of Interior Secretary-General Hassan Omar Ali played a key role in the removal from Djibouti of the previous UNHCR representative. Like the previous UNHCR rep, Thiry could remain in Djibouti for several months before departing. In contrast, the Eritrean Ambassador received only 48 hours to leave the country, following the June 11 firefight at Ras Doumeira. END COMMENT.

TEXT OF GODJ LETTER SEEKING WFP REP'S REMOVAL

111. (SBU) Embassy's informal translation from French language original follows.

BEGIN TEXT.

"To the Representative of the World Food Program:

Mr. Representative,

The Djiboutian Government has decided to put an end to your

mission, in view of the absence of cooperation with the competent authorities, which has reached a deep deterioration in relations.

For that purpose, the Executive Director of the World Food Program has been informed of this decision, and your replacement has been requested.

Therefore, you are asked to take all necessary steps to leave Djibouti as soon as possible.

Ahmed Ali Silay
(Acting) Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation

CC: Executive Director
Regional Director
UN System Coordinator in Djibouti"

END TEXT,
WONG